

MONMOUTHSHIRE MEADOWS GROUP

Aim - To conserve and enhance the landscape by enabling members to maintain, manage and restore their semi-natural grasslands and associated features.

Contents

1. Chairman's Update.
2. Continued success finding species-rich meadows in the final year of the Gwent Grasslands Initiative
3. Flora of Monmouthshire
4. Surveys of Grasslands in 2008
5. Grassland Fungi & 'Pony Poo'
6. Hay Making 2007
7. Surveys, training, work tasks and Haymaking

Membership

To join contact Diana on 01600 860046 or e-mail Maggie at monmouthmeadows@aol.co.uk or Bill at bchoward@24e.co.uk

Chairman's Update.

By Diana Bevan

The first committee meeting of MMG was held on February 19th 2003, following a public meeting in Trellech which agreed that we should follow the example of the Parish Grasslands Project in St Briavels Common. People were eager to join the committee and I became the first chairman. This year the committee decided that officers should serve for a limited time to encourage others to join them, so I intend



Balsam bashing at Whitebrook

to retire at the AGM in spring 2008. We are looking for a replacement. The treasurer and secretary will retire in rotation. Please feel free to offer your services. It's a very jolly group and committee meetings are never dull.

Last summer and autumn's lengthy filming by BBC TV Wales was cut to 13 minutes so a lot of us found ourselves on the cutting room floor, but Ida Dunn, Ty Mawr and the Exmoor ponies had starring roles. The programme is part of the series *The Nature of Britain* with Alan Titchmarsh fronting it and Iolo Williams interviewing various people in Wales.

The programme was screened on October 17th. The producer, Barbara Lewis, has promised she will send us copies if anyone missed it.

The Open Days attracted an increased number of visitors, all of whom seemed delighted with the wild flowers although some people had difficulty finding the sites. The Parish Grassland Project and MMG have decided that next year

we will have separate dates for the two groups as visitors found it hard to visit all eight sites. We aim to have clearer signage and more press coverage.

The rainy weather in July made it difficult to cut and rake off hay and to organise work parties. The Himalayan Balsam bashing at Whitebrook Farm had to be rescheduled 3 times.

In association with Rebecca Price of Gwent Wild Life Trust I spoke at a workshop convened by Flora Locale at Springfield Farm. There were 12 professional ecologists present who were intrigued that both PGP and MMG are grass-roots organisations, not led by employees of councils or statutory bodies. They took my point that our groups could often carry out projects more quickly than the professional bodies as we are not hierarchical. We continue to do presentations to local societies when asked, the last one being in Chepstow which led to several residents coming to the Open Days. Steph Tyler and I also spoke to members of the Monmouth

Branch of Gwent Wildlife Trust in October.

We now have attractive postcards for sale. They are taken from Helen Scourse's painting, copies of which are on our notice boards in Trellech and Tintern.

Continued success finding species-rich meadows in the final year of the Gwent Grasslands Initiative.

By Rebecca Price

In what has been the final survey season of GWT's three year Gwent Grasslands Initiative, we have been busy ensuring all sites that historically were good for wildflowers have been revisited and assessed to determine whether they should become 'Local Wildlife Sites'. Local Wildlife Sites are wildlife rich areas identified and selected for their local nature conservation value. They are the most important places for wildlife outside of SSSIs and are vital in providing refuges and creating networks of sites acting as corridors for migration and dispersal.

Joined by Camilla Smith our seasonal surveyor (and equipped with our waterproofs!) we have located 98 new grassland Local Wildlife Sites. These were distributed throughout Monmouthshire, including the Wye Valley where the concentration of species-rich grasslands is particularly high. Survey highlights included a cluster of species-rich calcareous meadows near Five Lanes, Caerwent where calcareous indicators such as wild carrot and restharrow were found. It was also exciting to see the locally notable meadow saffron on a site near Abergavenny. Surveys were also carried out in Blaenau Gwent where in the

more upland environment a number of species rich acidic grasslands were found.

We have continued to support landowners in looking after these important Local Wildlife Sites with landowner visits, management advice and our newsletter 'Meadow Matters'. Earlier in the year we produced 'Wildlife Site Information Cards' for owners of Local Wildlife Sites. These cards which are tailored to each site, offer species information and management advice and were well received.

Our total number of Local Wildlife Sites now stands at over 300 sites, which includes over 30 sites owned by Monmouthshire Meadows Group members. We hope that our efforts over the past 3 years will help ensure these important wildflower sites thrive into the future.

Flora of Monmouthshire

By Steph Tyler

This is the title of an important and exciting new book by Trevor Evans, due out in November 2007.

Trevor who is the Meadows Group's President, has been the BSBI (Botanical Society for the British Isles) recorder for Monmouthshire vice-county 35 since 1972. Nobody knows more than him about the vice-county's plants. This new comprehensive work updates the last Flora of Monmouthshire by Arthur Wade in 1970, since when there have been huge changes. It maps the distribution of all species (except very common ones) found in five or more tetrads (2km x 2km squares) and provides information on all of these and of rarer species, both native and alien. There is also a foreword by Tim Rich, a profile of Trevor by Elsa Wood, chapters on geology by Naylor Firth and on habitats in

Monmouthshire by Stephanie Tyler and George Peterken as well as important chapters by the author on botanical sites and changes in the flora of the vice-county, especially over the last 40 years.

Trevor has completed a mammoth task in writing the texts and collating so much information. Numerous volunteers, listed in the book, also contributed records of plants for the maps. With well over 600 pages, including numerous colour plates and black and white sketches, the Flora is a bargain at £15 provided you buy one before 31 March 2008 and collect it from Trevor at La Cuesta, Mounon Road, Chepstow NP16 5BS. Copies will also be available from the Gwent Wildlife Trust office at Seddon House, Dingestow or from Stephanie Tyler at Yew Tree Cottage, Lone Lane, Penallt near Monmouth Tel. 01600 719890. If you want a copy sent through the post then the price will be £19.50. Please write to Trevor for one and make sure you put in your cheque and postal address. After 31 March 2008 the Flora will cost £25. All cheques made payable please to 'Monmouthshire Flora'.

Surveys of Grasslands in 2008

By Steph Tyler

Plant Surveys have been carried out at most members' fields and some records have been obtained for birds and butterflies. However, we know very little of the importance of our fields for fungi, reptiles and amphibians, grasshoppers, beetles, moths and spiders. Sheila Spence has surveyed a few sites for meadow fungi and is willing to look at other sites (see separate news item about this and please contact her if your

field supports waxcaps or other meadow fungi).

Elsa Wood at Tintern is also an expert mycologist and may be willing to survey some fields.

Caroline Howard is happy looking at mosses and liverworts and Dave Green will assess the use of some sites by reptiles and amphibians.

A few keen members have done some moth trapping on their own sites, as have Ian & Jessica Rabjohns at Penallt and Ray Armstrong on Beacon Hill. In the spring and summer of 2008 we want to start to try to extend our knowledge of moths and other invertebrates living in our hay meadows and grazing pastures.

We have some limited funding from Local Agenda 21 through Monmouthshire County Council for help with travel costs and other expenses. Martin Anthoney and Roger James have kindly agreed to survey moths at one or two sites in 2008. This will involve four nights of trapping per site in the spring, summer and autumn and a daytime visit. John Harper has offered to look at woodlice, millipedes, centipedes, snails, harvestmen, pseudoscorpions, spiders, click beetles, shield bugs, hoverflies and ants at four or five sites. Does any member have any expertise in other groups such as grasshoppers? If so, please get in touch.

steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com

Dates for your Diary

*** Our autumn talk and dinner – now rescheduled for Thursday, November 22nd at Whitebrook Village Hall.**

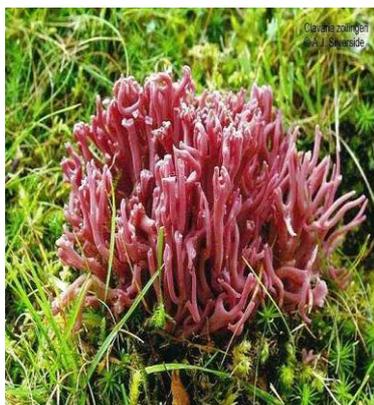
*** Our AGM will be on Thursday, April 3rd 2008. With a talk by Dave Green Venue TBA.**

*** Open Day Sunday, June 8th sites TBA**

Grassland Fungi & 'Pony Poo'

By George and Sheila Spence

2006 saw the start of a new 3 year project looking particularly at meadow grassland, upland and unimproved grassland which together with churchyards provide excellent sites for waxcaps and other interesting and often rare grassland fungi. We are at present particularly interested in records for the following grassland fungi: Pink Waxcap (*Hygrocybe calyptriformis*), Date Waxcap (*Hygrocybe spadicea*), Olive Earthtongue (*Microglossum olivaceum*) and the Violet Coral (*Clavaria zollingeri*).



Clavaria zollingeri

Also high on the 'wanted' list is *Poronia punctata*, the Nail Fungus which only grows on horse or pony dung. It looks a bit like a beige/brown clout nail with a dark brown, hard 'stem' protruding deep into the substrate. We have already surveyed several exciting grassland sites in Monmouthshire but if you have one which regularly produces the often colourful displays of waxcap and other grassland fungi we would like to know about it and perhaps come along and survey your grassland this autumn.

*** PGP Autumn meeting- Tuesday, November 13th traditional hay-making. Tel 01594 530513 - details**

For further details about grassland fungi, please contact George or Sheila Spence on 01531 631736/07855581606or email gwentfungusgroup@btinternet.com



Hygrocybe calyptriformis

Hay Making 2007

By Bill Howard

It rained too much in July which made haymaking impossible. In late July we heard that because hay making was delayed, John Childs would not be able to cut our hay. From one of our members, I heard that Ian Morgan at Llanishen could cut hay for £20 per hour which is less than John Childs is charging.

Five members had their hay cut producing 334 bales. We prioritised the hay making and as result the five people who wanted their fields flailed and the grass carried off dwindled to two by the time we got round to them.

Next year we plan to make more use of Ian Morgan who is able to carry out a range of operations including topping and hedge cutting.

We sold hay at £2 per bale . We have not heard yet how much operations have cost but at £2 per bale we expect to break even or lose a little. Next year, if members want to sell their hay, they should ensure that the field is free of stones, ant hills and ragwort.

Surveys, training, work tasks and Haymaking.

By Steph Tyler

Spring to autumn have been busy times for the Group with surveys of new members' fields and providing relevant advice, two training sessions and several work tasks completed, not to mention organising cutting and hay-baling in many members' fields.

Surveys were made at eight sites, including fields in the Angidy Valley and near Cleddon, at Broadoak just over in Herefordshire, at Redbrook just across the Gloucestershire border and to a wonderful upland field near The Folly above Pontypool. Harebells, Betony and Devil's-bit Scabious were a riot of colour among Knapweed and Birds-foot Trefoil at the latter site. All the fields visited either had a diverse flora or the potential for managing and enhancing for flowers. With Gemma Bode of the Gwent Wildlife Trust, Steph Tyler also visited several sites where seed collected in the GWT/MMG seed-harvester in 2006, was scattered. There were mixed results with some patches now very diverse and in some fields as on Mitchel Troy Common only one or two plants of Hay-rattle among the lush growth of Yorkshire Fog evident from the hard work. Caroline Howard and Steph also surveyed the area at Trellech School where we had sown seed and this mini-meadow was a great success with ox-eye daisies, knapweed and various meadow grasses amongst the plants that had grown. A visit to the Rogers' farm at Trellech, again where we had sown seed, showed that this had been less successful but we will try again with more hay-rattle. Two training sessions, one by Caroline Howard near Trellech

and on Lydart and one by Dave Green at Tymawr were popular but unfortunately a second event by each was called off for lack of support.

Work tasks also had their problems. One event to clear bramble and bracken at the wet pasture at Tymawr had only the organisers Steph and Lindsay Tyler and one volunteer from the Convent braving the weather though Frank Chetwynd, another MMG volunteer, had turned up but at the wrong site (given wrong info by me!). It was after days of rain and a morning of heavy rain but some progress was made.

Himalayan Balsam pulling parties had also to be cancelled several times because of rain but a successful small balsam bashing party eventually took place at Whitebrook Farm with a wonderful supper provided by the Gregsons, our hosts.

The hay-raking at Tymawr



Hay-raking at Tymawr

was well-attended and it was good to see several new members there who had joined at the Open Day at the Convent back in early June. A good time was had by all. Next year we must arrange a picnic lunch after the hay-raking to turn it into a more sociable occasion. The nuns did however, provide welcome drinks and biscuits. Two work tasks to fence land prior to the ponies' arrival were carried out at Tymawr and Whitelye Common – thanks are due to Lindsay Tyler and Steph & Alan Poulter for this.

The Open Days in June were a great success. Thanks to Sister Gillian at Tymawr, Ida Dunn at Maryland, Amanda and Peter Copp at Lower Glyn Farm and the Gwent Wildlife Trust at Pentwyn Farm for allowing us access. Thanks too go to the many members who manned the events.

The wet summer gave Bill Howard a few headaches with hay cutting for members and we thank him for all his hard and persistent work to get the job done.

Moving the Group's two Exmoor ponies from one site to another and constantly checking their welfare caused Steph and Alan Poulter a lot of work. The first move in March, when the ponies were led along the road by Steph P, Steph T and Gemma Bode from fields at Penallt to a wet pasture at Tymawr was filmed by a BBC film crew and presenter, Iolo Williams, interviewed nuns and Steph Tyler about the use of the ponies for conservation grazing. Luckily the crew did not film one pony rushing off en route nor them later breaking out of the pasture and moving to a large lawn near The Narth where they were more than reluctant to be caught again and led back to the Convent. Subsequently we moved them in a horse-box rather than leading them on foot! Brief homes for them included fields at Trellech, the wet pasture around the Virtuous Well, a field at Ninewells near Cleddon and a very boggy Whitelye Common. Presently they are back in their former autumn and winter home range in Lone Lane at Penallt, doing a great job in eating back the summer's growth and providing unlimited supplies of dung for Lindsay's compost-heap!